



STATE SENATOR • LIZ BRATER • 18TH DISTRICT

Brater Press Release

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BRATER INTRODUCES CHILD PROTECTION LEGISLATION

Brater: All children deserve a second chance at life

LANSING—State Sen. Liz Brater (D-Ann Arbor) at a press conference today introduced a legislation package designed to guarantee appropriate sentencing of minors convicted of severe crimes.

Over the past year, Sen. Brater has been working with child advocacy and civil rights organizations to develop laws that will ensure children who commit violent crimes get a second chance at life. Today, she announced a four-bill package that would prohibit sentencing an individual convicted of a crime before the age of 18 to imprisonment for life without the possibility of parole.

“These children have committed horrible crimes, and must be held accountable for their actions,” said Sen. Brater. “No one is saying these individuals should get off with just a slap on the wrist, but locking them away forever ignores the fact that there is a chance they could eventually become productive members of society.”

According to *Second Chances*, a report issued by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Michigan, of the 306 Michigan prisoners serving life without parole sentences for crimes committed before the age of 18, 146, or almost half, committed their crimes before the age of 16. The laws that exist now tie the hands of judges by mandating life without parole sentences even in cases of felony murder when the convicted child is not the central perpetrator of the crime. A report issued jointly by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch earlier this month drew national attention to this issue and pointed out that Michigan was among the states with highest populations of minors sentenced to life without the possibility of parole.

The joint study found that the United States is one of very few countries in the world that permit children to be sentenced to life without the possibility of parole. The Convention on the Rights of the Child forbids this practice, and the United States and Somalia are the only two countries in the world who have not ratified the Convention.

“These children should be punished for their crimes, but it is unreasonable to assume that no chance exists for them to later function as productive members of society,” said Rep. Condino (D-Southfield).

A poll conducted by the Wayne State University Center for Urban Studies shows strong public support for reforming laws that allow minors to be sentenced to life without parole. In a state-wide poll, 72% of respondents said they believed adolescents under the age of 18 who commit violent offences are strong candidates for rehabilitation.

“The preliminary results of this study suggest that the people in the state of Michigan are unequivocally against locking up children for life,” said Terrence Allen, Assistant Professor in the Wayne State School of Social work and co-author of the above-mentioned study.

As prisoners age, they typically become less violent. Over two-thirds of Michigan prisoners sentenced to life without parole as youths are held in Custody Level 2 environments, with Level 5 serving as the most secure. Only 15% of Michigan prisoners who were sentenced as minors to life without the possibility of parole are currently held in maximum security, or Level 5, facilities.

“We must recognize that the possibility exists that these people are now very different than when they committed their crimes,” said Sen. Brater. “Most deserve a second look.”

For a copy of *The Rest of Their Lives*, the report issued by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, please visit: <http://www.amnestyusa.org/countries/usa/clwop/report.pdf>.

Second Chances, the Michigan-specific report by ACLU, is available at: <http://nicic.org/Library/020290>.

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State Senator Brater represents Senate District 18 which includes the cities of Ann Arbor, Ypsilanti, and Chelsea, the Villages of Barton Hills and Dexter, and the following townships: Ann Arbor, Augusta, Dexter, Freedom, Lima, Lyndon, Northfield, Salem, Scio, Sharon, Superior, Sylvan, Webster and Ypsilanti. She is the minority vice chair of the natural Resources and Environmental Affairs Committee and the Agriculture, Forestry, and Tourism Committee.